
The Negro and Socialism

By

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There are no two questions more often discussed than "The Negro" and "Socialism." Especially in the United States the so-called Negro problem is the subject of constant debate and "Socialism" most thoroughly misunderstood. Both these questions are closely related.

Conflict between workers and owners of industry

Under our present system of society, a wide and irreconcilable difference of interest exists between those who work for a living and the landlords, employers, and bankers—the capitalists—who own the lands, mills, mines, factories and railroads which constitute the means of production and distribution of wealth. Workers, fundamentally, are sellers of labor power while employers are buyers of labor power. Just as the seller of any commodity wants to get a high price for the goods he sells and the prospective buyer desires to pay a low price, so it is with the workers, he wants to sell his labor power for a high wage and to work short hours, while his employer who is a buyer of labor power desires to pay a low price for long hours of work. High wages for the worker mean a chance to live better to educate his children, to provide for old age, sickness and unemployment, while short hours give him leisure and enable him to develop the cultural side of his life. Consequently, when wages are high and the work day short the life of the workers is high, and when wages are low and working hours long the worker's life is low.

In distinct contrast to the aim of the worker is the aim of the employer. Like any other buyer the employer wants to purchase labor power cheaply, that is, to pay low wages. For when wages are low

and the cost of living high, that is, when the life of the workers is low, the profits of the employer are high. For profits represent the difference between what an employer spends for wages, raw materials, etc., and what he sells his product for. These conflicting aims between the buyers and sellers of labor power exist in spite of any similarity of race, creed or nationality and compel workers and employers both to organize to protect their respective interest. Workers organize in trade unions and cooperative societies while employers unite in chambers of commerce, manufacturers associations, etc.

Democrats and Republicans are against the workers

In the conflict of interest between workers and owners of industry Democrats and Republicans alike represent the interest of the rich, the owners of industry. This is natural since both parties get their campaign funds from the bankers, landlords and corporations; and, in politics as in everything else "he who pays the piper calls the tune." Therefore, when workers demand higher pay to get a higher living level, Republicans and Democrats side with the owners who pay their campaign funds.

Democrats and Republicans do nothing for the Negro

Neither Democrats nor Republicans really serve the interests of the Negro. The Republicans are weeding the Negro out of their party's council to make themselves acceptable to the white South. Their efforts began with President Harding, who in a speech in Birmingham, Ala., in 1921 said: "There is a fundamental, eternal and inescapable difference between whites and Negroes." This statement of Mr. Harding is in direct contrast to truth and scientific knowledge.

With power resting securely in their hands for the last sixty-five years—with only two short breaches—the Republican Party has faithfully served the interest of the employers of labor, the bankers and industrial magnates, but has not passed in recent years a single measure to give to workers greater security or higher living standards, or to the Negro justice.

The Republicans feel that they do not have to offer anything to Negroes to get our support because we are fish already caught. Lynching, segregation, jim-crowism, disfranchisement, high rents, low wages, unemployment and peonage still haunt each succeeding generation while Republican politicians talk about our "debt of gratitude to

Lincoln." A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since the days of Lincoln and Douglass.

Over a decade ago they promised us the Dyer anti-lynching bill. It is still a promise, and lynching goes merrily on. They could have passed that bill any time they wished; instead, they voted it down. The Republican Party today has nothing in common with the party of Lincoln except the name. The debt of gratitude—if ever we owed it—has long since been paid. In view of the record of the Republican Party to date, with its avowed determination to become lily-white to win the South, the self-respect of the Negro race and our concern for the future of our children demand that we break with the political past of our fathers. We must seek a new path to manhood, honor and freedom, by supporting a party which represents our economic interest and which stands for social justice for all men.

If the sin of the Republican Party is one of omission, the Democrats have many sins of commission on their conscience. In the South where most lynchings occur the Democrats are in control. The South where disfranchisement, peonage and jim-crowism are at their worst is the stronghold of the Democratic Party. The bleached bones and charred bodies of six thousand Negroes lynched since emancipation, nearly all of them in states where Democrats control the state and local governments, forbid us to entrust to the Democratic Party our fate and the future of our children. Such a course would lead only to an increase of the evils from which we now suffer and brand us as unworthy to be called men, but curs who lick the boots that kick us. Neither as workers nor as Negroes can we conscientiously support either the Democratic or Republican Party.

The Socialist Party stands for the workers

As explained before, both Republicans and Democrats use the political powers of the state in the interest of the wealthy men who want to buy labor power cheaply and who pay the campaign expenses of both parties. The laws passed by Republicans and Democrats are in the interest of this class. Consequently, the workers—the sellers of labor power—who want to get higher wages, steadier work, shorter hours, old age pensions, lower rents, etc., have had to organize a party of their own, one which they finance and can therefore control, in order that the political powers of the state shall be used in the interest of all the people for social, economic and political justice. That party is the Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party strives to apply to our economic and industrial life the true principle of genuine democracy by securing for the workers their rightful privilege of control over the means upon which their existence depends. The existence of workers depends upon having a place to work, a job or salaried position. The Socialist Party therefore demands that the big plants and factories where the people work and produce the necessities of life, as well as the railroads, the coal mines, the trusts, the oil wells and all the natural resources of the nation should be owned by all the people and operated co-operatively and in a democratic way in the interest of all the people instead of for the private profits of a few.

We already have public ownership of the streets, the schools, the post office, the fire departments, etc., and what we Socialists demand is ownership of the big industries and the natural resources of the country in the same way, a way that has proved advantageous to the public in matters like the schools, the roads and the fire department. Because they stand for labor, Socialists favor any immediate proposals that will increase the pay, the power and the security of livelihood of all workers. For instance, Socialists favor a higher school age, old age pensions and unemployment insurance, as well as measures to lower rents and raise wages, and measures to guarantee the civil rights both of workers on strike and the Negro.

How Socialists would help the Negro

About 98% of Negroes are industrial or agricultural workers. Therefore, any measures that will help workers will also help the Negro race in a special degree. This is particularly true because Negro professional men are directly dependent on the prosperity of the Negro workers, who are their clients, patients or pupils.

An old age pension law will benefit all workers, but especially Negroes, because Negroes usually get lower pay than others and are therefore less able to save for their old age. Unemployment insurance will enable a worker who is laid off to get a part of his pay just as a worker who is hurt on the job today gets part of his pay through workmen's compensation. This measure will especially benefit Negroes for, owing to prejudice existing in many places, Negroes are the first to be fired and the last to be hired. And the same thing applies to the various other measures that Socialists favor for the immediate benefit of labor. The Negro will be benefited to a greater degree than other workers.

The Socialists are interested in the Negro

Socialists are particularly interested in securing for Negroes all the rights now enjoyed by white workers and a higher standard of living as well. When the Dyer anti-lynching bill was defeated by the combined efforts of Republicans and Democrats, and Dyer failed to reintroduce it, the late Victor Berger, a Socialist Congressman, promptly did so. Socialists both white and colored have helped substantially every effort of Negro workers to organize, as in the case of the Pullman porters union, the Negro motion picture operators, etc. Also Socialists have—in some cases successfully—tried to break down the color bar which exists in some trade unions. The Socialist Party is the only party that has in its national platform a proposal to cut down the representation in Congress of those states which deny to any of their citizens the right to vote, by making representation dependent upon the number of votes cast instead of on population.

Socialists take this stand because they realize that the task of getting control of government and industry for the benefit of the workers is a tremendous one, and that to accomplish this task they need the support of all workers regardless of race, creed or nationality. In other words—though by no means all workers realize it—Socialists white as well as colored realize fully that all workers are in the same boat together and must cooperate, must learn to live together without prejudice and strive together for a higher standard of living and a higher cultural level for all.

As already explained workers are sellers of labor power, and it is certainly no advantage for white workers if Negro workers have a lower standard of living and are getting a lower price, that is a lower wage, for their labor power. A cotton farmer living in South Carolina and getting 16 cents a pound for cotton would be badly worried if other Carolina cotton growers were getting only 8 cents for their cotton; for he would know that he could not continue to get 16 cents when his neighbors were getting only half as much. So white workers who are intelligent together with all Socialists realize that they cannot keep on getting eight or ten dollars for a day's wage while their Negro fellow workers get half as much. Therefore, from the point of view of sound self-interest as well as from a deep sense of justice. Socialists want to help raise the standard of living of their fellow Negro workers. In the long run the workers can only progress if they are united.

The employers realize that the workers could get control of the nation's government and industry if

they were united, so they try to keep them divided by racial and religious differences. The Roman Empire, long a great and successful tyranny, used as its motto for keeping down its subject peoples "divide and rule." This is exactly the method of modern employers and capitalists. To continue ruling and exploiting the workers of all races they fan the flames of national, race, and religious prejudices in order to divide the workers and thus more easily keep them down.

But the Socialists to accomplish their aims need the support of all the workers; we are therefore resolutely opposed to race and religious prejudice, to lynching, segregation and everything which divides and weakens the working class. Socialist stand for guaranteeing the civil rights of all men. We therefore call upon all workers and all other citizens who believe in social justice to come together on the basis of their common interest and work shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, for the day when poverty, lynching, unemployment, exploitation, discrimination, prejudice and war will be abolished from the face of the earth and man at last will be free.

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